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## MISCELLANEOUS SECTION.

**The Religious Character of Abraham Lincoln.**

BY B. B. TYLER, D.D., NEW YORK CITY.

THIRTY years ago the bullet of an assassin suddenly terminated the life among men of one who was an honor to his race. He was great and good. He was great because he was good. Mr. Lincoln's religious character was the one thing which, above all other features of his unique mental and moral as well as physical personality, lifted him above his fellow men.

Because an effort has been made to parade Abraham Lincoln as an unbeliever I have been led to search carefully for the facts in his life bearing on this point. The testimony seems to be almost entirely, if not altogether, on one side. I can not account for the statement which Mr. Herndon makes in his life of the martyred president that "Mr. Lincoln had no faith." For twenty-five years Mr. Herndon was Abraham Lincoln's law partner in Springfield, Ill. He had the best opportunities to know Abraham Lincoln. When, however, he affirms that "Mr. Lincoln had no faith," he speaks without warrant. It is simply certain that he uses words in their usually accepted signification, altho his statement concerning Mr. Lincoln is not true.

Abraham Lincoln was a man of profound faith. He believed in God. He believed in Christ. He believed in the Bible. He believed in men. His faith made him great. His life is a beautiful commentary on the words, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." There was a time in Mr. Lincoln's experience when his faith faltered, as there was a time when his reason tottered; but these sad experiences were temporary, and Abraham Lincoln was neither an infidel nor a lunatic. It is easy to trace in the life of

this colossal character a steady growth of faith. This grace in him increased steadily in breadth and in strength with the passing years, until it came to pass that his last public utterances show forth the confidence and the fire of an ancient Hebrew prophet.

It is true that Mr. Lincoln never united with the Church, altho a life-long and regular attendant on its services. He had a reason for occupying a position outside the fellowship of the Church of Christ as it existed in his day and in his part of the world. This reason Mr. Lincoln did not hesitate to declare. He explained on one occasion that he had never become a church-member because he did not like and could not in conscience subscribe to the long and frequently complicated statements of Christian doctrines which characterized the confessions of the Churches. He said: "When any Church will inscribe over its altar as its sole qualification for membership the Savior's condensed statement of the substance of both law and gospel, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself,' that Church will I join with all my heart and soul."

Abraham Lincoln in these words recognizes the central figure of the Bible, Jesus of Nazareth, as "the Savior." He recognizes God as the supreme Lawgiver, and expresses readiness, while eschewing theological subtleties, to submit heart and soul to the supreme Lawgiver of the universe. His faith, according to this language, goes out manward as well as Godward. He believed not only in God, but he believed in man as well, and this Christianity, according to Christ, requires of all disciples of the great Teacher.

About a year before his assassination Mr. Lincoln, in a letter to the Hon. Joshua Speed, said: "I am profitably

engaged in reading the Bible. Take all of this book upon reason that you can and the balance on faith, and you will live and die a better man." He saw and declared that the teaching of the Bible had a tendency to improve character. He had a right view of this sacred literature. Its purpose is character building.

The Hon. Leonard Swett, who knew Abraham Lincoln well, said at the unveiling of the Chicago monument that Mr. Lincoln "believed in God as the supreme ruler of the universe, the guide of men, and the controller of the great events and destinies of mankind. He believed himself to be an instrument and leader in this country of the force of freedom."

From this it appears that his belief was not merely theoretical, but that it was practical. He regarded himself as an instrument, as Moses was an instrument in the hands of almighty God, to lead men into freedom.

It was after his election, in the autumn of 1860, and but a short time before his inauguration as president of the United States, that in a letter to Judge Joseph Gillespie he said: "I have read on my knees the story of Gethsemane, where the Son of God prayed in vain that the cup of bitterness might pass from Him. I am in the garden of Gethsemane now, and my cup of bitterness is full and overflowing."

From this it is clear that he believed the Jesus of the Gospels to be "the Son of God." And what a sense of responsibility he must at the time of writing this letter have experienced to cause him to declare, "I am in the garden of Gethsemane now, and my cup of bitterness is full and overflowing!" Only a superlatively good man, only a man of genuine piety, could use honestly such language as this. These words do not indicate unbelief or agnosticism. If ever a man in public life in these United States was removed the distance of the antipodes from the coldness and bleakness of agnosticism, that man was Abraham Lincoln. This

confession of faith, incidentally made in a brief letter to a dear friend, is not only orthodox according to the accepted standards of orthodoxy, but, better, it is evangelical. To him the hero of the Gospel histories was none other than "the Son of God." By the use of these words did Mr. Lincoln characterize Jesus of Nazareth.

Mr. Herndon has said in his life of Abraham Lincoln that he never read the Bible, but Mr. Alexander Williamson, who was employed as a tutor in President Lincoln's family in Washington, said that "Mr. Lincoln very frequently studied the Bible with the aid of Cruden's Concordance, which lay on his table." If Mr. Lincoln was not a reader and student of the inspired literature which we call the Bible, what explanation can be made of his language just quoted, addressed to Judge Gillespie, "I have read on my knees the story of Gethsemane, where the Son of God prayed in vain that the cup of bitterness might pass from Him"?

I have admitted that in Mr. Lincoln's experience there was a time when his faith faltered. It is interesting to know in what manner he came to have the faith which in the maturity of his royal manhood and in the zenith of his intellectual powers he expressed. One of his pastors—for he sat under the ministry of three men, chiefly in Springfield, Ill.—Rev. James Smith, has told in what way Mr. Lincoln came to be an intelligent believer in the Bible, in Jesus as the Son of God, and in Christianity as Divine in its origin, and a mighty moral and spiritual power for the regeneration of men and of the race. Mr. Smith placed before him, he says, the arguments for and against the Divine authority and inspiration of the Scriptures. To the arguments on both sides Mr. Lincoln gave a patient, impartial, and searching investigation. He himself said that he examined the arguments as a lawyer investigates testimony in a case in which he is deeply interested. At the conclusion of the investigation he



declared that the argument in favor of the Divine authority and inspiration of the Bible is unanswerable.

So far did Mr. Lincoln go in his open sympathy with the teachings of the Bible that on one occasion, in the presence of a large assembly, he delivered the address at an annual meeting of the Springfield, Ill., Bible Society. In the course of his address he drew a contrast between the decalog and the most eminent lawgiver of antiquity, in which he said: "It seems to me that nothing short of infinite wisdom could by any possibility have devised and given to man this excellent and perfect moral code. It is suited to men in all the conditions of life, and inculcates all the duties they owe to their Creator, to themselves, and their fellow men."

Mr. Lincoln prepared an address, in which he declared that this country can not exist half-slave and half-free. He affirmed the saying of Jesus, "A house divided against itself can not stand." Having read this address to some friends, they urged him to strike out that portion of it. If he would do so, he could probably be elected to the United States Senate; but if he delivered the address as written, the ground taken was so high, the position was so advanced, his sentiments were so radical, he would probably fail of gaining a seat in the supreme legislative body of the greatest republic on earth.

Mr. Lincoln, under those circumstances, said: "I know there is a God, and that He hates the injustice of slavery. I see the storm coming, and I know that His hand is in it. If He has a place and a work for me, and I think He has, I believe I am ready. I am nothing, but truth is everything. I know I am right, because I know that liberty is right, for Christ teaches it, and Christ is God."

And yet we are asked to believe that a man who could express himself in this way and show this courage was a doubter, a skeptic, an unbeliever, an

agnostic, an infidel. "Christ is God." This was Mr. Lincoln's faith in 1860, found in a letter addressed to the Hon. Newton Bateman.

Mr. Lincoln's father was a Christian. Old Uncle Tommy Lincoln, as his friends familiarly called him, was a good man. He was what might be called a ne'er-do-well. As the world counts success, Thomas Lincoln, the father of Abraham Lincoln, was not successful, but he was an honest man. He was a truthful man. He was a man of faith. He worshiped God. He belonged to the Church. He was a member of a congregation in Charleston, Ill., which I had the honor to serve in the beginning of my ministry, known as the Christian Church. He died not far from Charleston, and is buried a few miles distant from the beautiful little town, the county-seat of Coles County, Ill.

During the last illness of his father Mr. Lincoln wrote a letter to his step-brother, John Johnston, which closes with the following sentences: "I sincerely hope that father may recover his health, but at all events tell him to remember to call upon and confide in our great, and good, and merciful Maker, who will not turn away from him in any extremity. He notes the fall of the sparrow, and numbers the hairs of our heads, and He will not forget the dying man who puts his trust in Him. Say to him that if we could meet now it is doubtful whether it would not be more painful than pleasant, but that if it be his lot to go now he will soon have a joyful meeting with loved ones gone before, and where the rest of us, through the mercy of God, hope ere long to join them."

From this it appears that Mr. Lincoln cherished a hope of life everlasting through the mercy of God. This sounds very much like the talk of a Christian.

Altho Mr. Lincoln was not a church member, he was a man of prayer. He believed that God can hear, does hear, and answer prayer. Mr. Lincoln said

in conversation with General Sickles concerning the battle of Gettysburg, that he had no anxiety as to the result. At this General Sickles expressed surprise, and inquired into the reason for this unusual state of mind at that period in the history of the war. Mr. Lincoln hesitated to accede to the request of General Sickles, but was finally prevailed upon to do so, and this is what he said :

"Well, I will tell you how it was. In the pinch of your campaign up there, when everybody seemed panic-stricken, and nobody could tell what was going to happen, oppressed by the gravity of our affairs, I went into my room one day and locked the door, and got down on my knees before Almighty God, and prayed to Him mightily for victory at Gettysburg. I told Him this was His war, and our cause His cause, but that we could not stand another Fredericksburg or Chancellorsville. And I then and there made a solemn vow to Almighty God that if He would stand by our boys at Gettysburg I would stand by Him. And He *did*, and I *will*. And after that (I don't know how it was, and I can't explain it) but soon a sweet comfort crept into my soul that things would go all right at Gettysburg, and that is why I had no fears about you."

Such faith as this will put to the blush many who are members of the Church.

It was afterward that General Sickles asked him what news he had from Vicksburg. He answered that he had no news worth mentioning, but that Grant was still "pegging away" down there, and he thought a good deal of him as a general, and had no thought of removing him notwithstanding that he was urged to do ; and "besides," he added, "I have been praying over Vicksburg also, and believe our Heavenly Father is going to give us victory there too, because we need it, in order to bisect the Confederacy and have the Mississippi flow unvexed to the sea."

When he entered upon the task to which the people of the United States had called him, at the railway station in Springfield on the eve of his departure to Washington to take the oath of

office, he delivered an address. It is a model. I quote it entire. It is as follows :

"My friends, no one not in my position can realize the sadness I feel at this parting. To this people I owe all that I am. Here I have lived more than a quarter of a century. Here my children were born, and here one of them lies buried. I know not how soon I shall see you again. I go to assume a task more than that which has devolved upon any other man since the days of Washington. He never would have succeeded except for the aid of Divine Providence, upon which he at all times relied. I feel that I cannot succeed without the same Divine blessing which sustained him, and on the same almighty Being I place my reliance for support. And I hope you, my friends, will all pray that I may receive that Divine assistance, without which I cannot succeed, but with which success is certain. Again, I bid you an affectionate farewell."

At the time of Mr. Lincoln's assassination these words were printed in a great variety of forms. In my home for a number of years, beautifully framed, these parting words addressed to the friends of many years in Springfield, Ill., ornamented my humble residence. And yet one of his biographers refers to this address as if its genuineness may well be doubted. At the time of its delivery it was taken down and published broadcast in the papers of the day.

But it would be wearisome to you to recite all the evidences bearing on the religious character of Abraham Lincoln. John G. Nicolay well says : "Benevolence and forgiveness were the very basis of his character ; his world-wide humanity is aptly embodied in a phrase of his second inaugural : 'With malice toward none, with charity for all.' His nature was deeply religious, but he belonged to no denomination ; he had faith in the eternal justice and boundless mercy of Providence, and made the Golden Rule of Christ his practical creed."

In this passage Mr. Nicolay refers especially to Mr. Lincoln's second inaugural address. This address has the

ring of an ancient Hebrew prophet. Only a man of faith and piety could deliver such an address. After the struggles through which the country had passed Mr. Lincoln's self-poise, his confidence in God, his belief in and affection for his fellow men, remained unabated. In Mr. Lincoln's second inaugural address he used these words :

"Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained : neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease when or even before the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces ; but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered ; that of neither has been answered fully.

"The Almighty has His own purposes. 'Wo unto the world because of offenses, for it must needs be that offenses come ; but wo to that man by whom the offense cometh.' If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war, as the wo due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with a lash shall be paid with another drawn by a sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'

"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in ; to bind up the nation's wounds ; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his

orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

The spirit of this address, under the circumstances, is intensely Christian, and it is one of the most remarkable speeches in the literature of the world.

When Mr. Lincoln was urged to issue his Proclamation of Emancipation he waited on God for guidance. He said to some who urged this matter, who were anxious to have the President act without delay : "I hope it will not be irreverent for me to say that, if it is probable that God would reveal His will to others on a point so connected with my duty, it might be supposed He would reveal it directly to me, for, unless I am more deceived in myself than I often am, it is my earnest desire to know the will of Providence in this matter, and if I can learn what it is I will do it."

Mr. Stoddard, in his "Life of Lincoln," gives attention beyond any of his biographers to the religious side of Mr. Lincoln's character. Commenting on the inaugural from which I have quoted, Mr. Stoddard said :

"His mind and soul had reached the full development in a religious life so unusually intense and absorbing that it could not otherwise than utter itself in the grand sentences of his last address to the people. The knowledge had come, and the faith had come, and the charity had come, and with all had come the love of God which had put away all thought of rebellious resistance to the will of God leading, as in his earlier days of trial, to despair and insanity."

I wish to call special attention to Mr. Lincoln's temperance habits. He was a teetotaler so far as the use of intoxicating liquors as a beverage was concerned. When the committee of the Chicago convention waited upon Mr. Lincoln to inform him of his nomination he treated them to ice-water and said :

"Gentlemen, we must pledge our mutual healths in the most healthy beverage which God has given to man. It is the only beverage I have ever used



or allowed in my family, and I can not conscientiously depart from it on the present occasion. It is pure Adam's ale from the spring."

Mr. John Hay, one of his biographers, says: "Mr. Lincoln was a man of exceedingly temperate habits. He made no use of either whisky or tobacco during all the years that I knew him."

Abraham Lincoln was a model in every respect but one. It was a mistake on the part of this great and good man that he never identified himself openly with the Church. I know what can be said in favor of his position. It is not, however, satisfactory. If all men were to act in this matter as Mr. Lincoln did, there would be no Church. This is obvious. Hence the mistake which he made. Otherwise, as to his personal habits; as to his confidence in God; as to his faith in man; as to his conception and use of the Bible; as to his habits of prayer; as to his judicial fairness; as to his sympathy with men—in all these respects, as in many others, Abraham Lincoln is a character to be studied and imitated.

### **Fair Play for the Catholics.**

BY DAVID JAMES BURRELL, D.D.,  
NEW YORK CITY.

AN article by John Talbot Smith, entitled "Fair Play for Catholic Christians," in the May number of *THE HOMILETIC REVIEW* ought not to pass unchallenged. The writer enters a distinct denial of the five following charges:

1. With steadfast persistence and increasing success, Rome has been seeking to obtain a master-hold upon the Government of the United States.

2. She has used her ecclesiastical power to control the votes of her members, and thus secure official position for those who support her claims.

3. She has laid her hand upon municipal, State, and national treasuries, and enriched herself at the public expense, coercing those who are hostile

to her into an unwilling support of her institutions, educational, eleemosynary and other.

4. In not a few cities her great cathedrals and churches, her protectories and hospitals, stand on ground for which she has paid nothing, or but a nominal price.

5. In New York City six Roman Catholic institutions received, from 1883 to 1893, fifteen times as much money as all the Protestant institutions together.

I. In his denial of the first charge he declares that as the Roman Catholic Church embraces "one seventh of the population" it "ought to have one seventh of the representation in the legislatures, State and national; one seventh of the official positions, foreign and domestic; one seventh of the educational offices, one member of the cabinet, and one out of every seven presidents"; a representation which he says his Church does not have. "Perhaps we get one place in twenty," he says, and naively adds, "these we are compelled to earn." In reply to which we assert: (1) The last census shows that the Roman Catholics in the United States are only a trifle over six millions, or about one tenth of the population. (2) The majority of them are recent immigrants or children of foreign parentage. They should not complain if a distribution of offices is not made at Castle Garden. (3) The offices in our country, both elective and by appointment, are not as a rule distributed upon a numerical basis, but with some reference to moral and intellectual fitness. This is one reason why our nine millions of colored citizens are so slightly represented. (4) While it may be charged in some quarters that American Catholics are, as a rule, deficient in some of the proper conditions of political preferment, it will probably not be denied that, where opportunity affords, they are wont to exhibit a most commendable zeal and forwardness. The general impression is that New York City, for example, has been

moderately well officered in all departments by the wise management of our Roman Catholic friends.

II. The following words in Father Smith's denial of the second charge will touch our sense of humor: "It has been very clear to the public for the last few years that no body of clergymen has such a record for non-interference in politics as the bishops and priests of the Catholic Church." If the writer intended this to be taken seriously, he will not be offended if we urge him to prevail upon his clerical brethren to simplify our municipal politics by pursuing the line of his suggestion on and before the ides of each November.

III. As to Catholic appropriation of public funds for the support of parochial schools Father Smith has this to say: "On grounds of conscience, we have built up a school system for our children which educates a million children. We pay for them, and the treasury is thus in pocket. We pay again for the support of the public schools; therefore, it is we, not our opponents, who are coerced into unwilling support. In New York State our schools save the public treasury \$22,000,000 annually, and we are taxed besides for the public schools." Here is a splendid show of indignant virtue. It should be understood, however, by this excellent brother that all other Churches have their denominational schools and are satisfied to foot the bills. The Catholic Church has a right to her parochial schools; but why does she alone of all the Churches go complaining to the public crib for support? The Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Episcopal, and Congregational Churches are not heard in any such appeal. If Protestant parents prefer to send their children to private or denominational rather than to the public schools, they do so at their own expense without murmuring. The Church that dances should be willing to pay the piper.

IV. With respect to the property

occupied by St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, the charge of crookedness in the securing of this valuable plot of real estate is characterized by Father Smith as "an old lie that has been tramping over the land for years, and has all the brass, vitality, and raggedness of the American social and psychological puzzle, "Weary Watkins." And he undertakes to dispose of the matter in a brief statement to the effect that "one Robert Sylburn bought it from the city in 1799 for £405," and that "passing through the hands of five owners" it came into the possession of the trustees of St. Patrick's Cathedral by legitimate purchase. "All this is on record," says he, "and the first promoter of the falsehood had only to go through the public records to have saved himself from a crime." But the matter is not so easily disposed of. The facts in this case are as follows: (1) "In 1799 the city of New York, for the consideration of \$1,012.50 and an annual rent of four bushels of wheat, payable on May 1 in each year, granted, by a sort of perpetual lease, lot 62 of the common lands of the city to one Robert Sylburn" (see book 150 of conveyances in register's office, p. 232). (2) After various transfers this property came into the possession of the trustees of St. Patrick's Cathedral in 1829. So far Father Smith is substantially correct. (3) From 1829 to 1852—a period of twenty-three years—this property was forfeited to the city for non-payment of rent twenty-three times in all. (4) In 1852 the Church secured from the city a release from the annual rental by payment of \$33.32 in cash. "This for the first time vested a fee simple, absolute title in the Church." (5) "This lot, 800 feet long, running from Fifth to Fourth avenues, had no frontage on Fiftieth street, but was cut off from that street by a strip ten inches wide on Fifth avenue, and five feet six inches wide on Fourth avenue. The city made an exchange with the Church of this 800 feet frontage, with